

The collection of the Qur’ān and the reason ‘Uthmān had copies of the Qur’ān copied out and burned the rest. The memorisation of the Qur’ān by the Companions in the time of the Prophet

In the time of the Prophet, the Qur’ān was scattered in the breasts of men. People wrote some of it on pages, on skins and on white stones and flat stones, scraps and other things. Then a great number of the reciters were killed in the Battle of Yamāma in the time of Abū Bakr. Something like 700 of them were killed in a single day and ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb suggested to Abū Bakr to collect the Qur’ān out of fear that the shaykhs of the reciters such as Ubayy, Ibn Mas‘ūd and Zayd would all die. Zayd ibn Thābit recommended that, and so after great effort, he collected it together without putting the *sūras* in order.

Al-Bukhārī reports that Zayd ibn Thābit said, “After the slaughter in the war of Yamāma, Abū Bakr sent for me, and ‘Umar was with him. Abū Bakr said, “‘Umar has come to me and said, “Many people were killed in the Battle of Yamāma, and I fear that many Qur’ān reciters will be killed in other places and so much of the Qur’ān will be lost unless you collect it. I think that you should collect the Qur’ān together.”” Abū Bakr said, ‘I said to ‘Umar, “How can I do something which the Messenger of Allah did not do?” ‘Umar said, “By Allah, it is better.” ‘Umar kept on at me about it until Allah opened my breast to it. I think what ‘Umar thinks.”” Zayd ibn Thābit continued, “‘Umar was sitting with him, not speaking. Abū Bakr said, ‘You are an intelligent young man and we have no doubts about you. You used to write down the revelation for the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. Therefore you are to search out the Qur’ān and collect it.’ By Allah, if he had obliged me to move one of the mountains, that would not have been weightier for me than his command to me to collect together the Qur’ān. I replied, ‘How can the two of you do something which the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, did not do?’ Abū Bakr said, ‘By Allah, it is better.’ He continued to keep on at me until Allah opened my

breast to that which Allah had opened the breasts of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar. So I began to search out the Qur’ān and collect it from the parchments, shoulder-blades, palm fronds and the breasts of men until I found two *āyats* of *Sūrat at-Tawba* with Khuzayma al-Anṣārī that I did not find with anyone else: ‘*A Messenger has come to you from among yourselves...*’ (9:128) The copy of the Qur’ān in which the Qur’ān was collected remained in the possession of Abū Bakr until Allah took him, and then it was with ‘Umar until Allah took him, and then it was with Ḥafṣa bint ‘Umar.”

If it is asked what was the point of ‘Uthmān unifying people under a single copy of the Qur’ān when Abū Bakr had already achieved that, then the response is that the aim of ‘Uthmān was not to gather people in order to compile the Qur’ān. Do you not see that he sent to Ḥafṣa to ask her to give him the copy of the Qur’ān so that it could be copied out and then returned to her? ‘Uthmān did that because people were disagreeing about the various recitations owing to the fact that the Companions had spread to different areas and had begun to strongly disagree, such as the conflict which took place between the people of Iraq and the people of Syria according to Ḥudhayfa.

They joined an expedition to Armenia and each group recited what had been transmitted to them. They disagreed and quarrelled and some of them called the others unbelievers, renouncing them completely, cursing one another. Ḥudhayfa was alarmed at what he saw. As soon as he arrived back to Madina, according to al-Bukhārī and at-Tirmidhī, before returning to his house he went to ‘Uthmān and said, “This Community has reached the stage where it will be destroyed!” “Why?” asked ‘Uthmān. He said, “It is about the Book of Allah. I was on this expedition and some of the people of Iraq, Syria and the Ḥijāz came together.” Then he described what had happened and said, “I fear that they will differ about their Book as the Jews and Christians differed.”

This is evidence of the falseness of those who say that the seven *ahruf* are the seven present readings because there is no disagreement about them. Suwayd ibn Ghafala reported from ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib that ‘Uthmān said, “What do you think about the copies of

the Qur’ān? The people have disagreed about the reciters until a man says, ‘My reading is better than your reading. My reading is more excellent than your reading.’ This is equivalent to disbelief.” He replied, “What is your view, *Amīr al-Mu’minīn*?” He said, “I think that we people should agree on one reading. If you differ today, those after you will disagree more strongly.” ‘Alī said, “The correct opinion is yours, *Amīr al-Mu’minīn*.” So ‘Uthmān sent a message to Ḥafṣa saying, “Send us the pages in your possession and we will copy them and then return them to you.” She sent them to him and he ordered Zayd ibn Thābit, ‘Abdullāh ibn az-Zubayr, Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣ, and ‘Abdu’r-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām to make copies of them. ‘Uthmān told the group of Qurayshis, “When you and Zayd ibn Thabit disagree about any of the Qur’ān, write it in the dialect of Quraysh. It was revealed in their language.” They did that. When they had copied it out, ‘Uthmān returned the pages to Ḥafṣa and he sent a copy of what they had copied out to every region and commanded that every sheet or copy which had any other form of the Qur’ān should be burned. ‘Uthmān did this after gathering the *Muhājirūn* and *Anṣār* and a group of Muslims and consulting them about it. They agreed to collect what was sound and firm of the well-known readings from the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and discard anything else. They thought that what he decided was right and correct. May Allah have mercy on him and all of them.

Ibn Shihāb said that he was told by ‘Ubaydullāh ibn ‘Abdullāh that ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd disliked Zayd ibn Thābit copying out the Qur’ān and said, “Company of Muslims, withdraw from making copies and entrusting it to one man. By Allah, I became Muslim while he was in the loins of an unbelieving father!” meaning Zayd ibn Thābit. That is why ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd said, “People of Iraq, conceal the copies of the Qur’ān you have and conceal them. Allah says, *‘Those who misappropriate will arrive on the Day of Rising with what they have misappropriated.’* (3:161). Meet Allah with the copies of the Qur’ān.” (at-Tirmidhī)

Abū Bakr al-Anbārī said, “The fact that Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān chose Zayd in the matter of collecting the Qur’ān does

not mean that they were putting him over ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd. ‘Abdullāh was better than Zayd, older in Islam, had attended more battles and possessed more virtues. Zayd, however, knew more of the Qur’ān than ‘Abdullah since he had memorised it all during the lifetime of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, whereas ‘Abdullāh had only memorised about seventy *sūras* while the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, was alive and learned the rest after his death. The one who knew the entire Qur’ān and memorised it while the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, was alive was more entitled to compile the Qur’ān and to be preferred and chosen to do so. No ignorant person should suppose that this is an attack on ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd since the fact that Zayd had the better memory of the Qur’an of the two does not mean that he should be preferred to him in general terms because Zayd also knew more Qur’ān than Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, and he was certainly not better than them or equal to them in virtue.”

Abū Bakr al-Anbārī said, “The objection which ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd made was done in anger and is not acted upon or accepted. There is no doubt that once he was no longer angry he was satisfied with the excellence of the decision of ‘Uthmān and the Companions of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and concurred with their agreement and abandoned his opposition to them.”

One scholar said that ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd died before learning all the Qur’ān. Yazīd ibn Hārūn said, “The two *sūras* of refuge have the same status as *al-Baqara* and *Āli ‘Imrān*. Anyone who claims that they are not part of the Qur’ān has rejected Allah Almighty.” He was asked, ‘What about what ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd says about them?’ He replied, “There is no disagreement among the Muslims that ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd died before memorising all of the Qur’ān.” This requires some investigation, as will come.

Ḥammād said – I think quoting Anas ibn Mālīk – “They disagreed about an *āyat* and would say, ‘The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, recited it to so-and-so.’

He might be three days from Madina and he would be sent for and would be asked, ‘How did the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, recite such-and-such an *āyat* to you?’ and they would write it as he said.” Ibn Shihāb said, “One day they disagreed about *tābūt*. Zayd said *tābūh*. Ibn az-Zubayr and Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣ said, *tābūt*. The disagreement was taken to ‘Uthmān who said, ‘Write it with *tā*’. It was revealed in the language of Quraysh.” (al-Bukhārī and at-Tirmidhī)

‘Uthmān had several copies of the Qur’ān made. Some say there were seven while the majority say that there were four. They were sent to various areas. Matrix copies were sent to Iraq, Syria and Egypt, and the reciters of the cities relied on them and none of them differed from the original copy in the manner in which it was conveyed. There is not found among the seven reciters any real difference in the words, neither more nor less. That is because they all relied on what was conveyed in ‘Uthmān’s copy.

Al-Anbārī quoted Suwayd ibn Ghafala in *Kitāb ar-Radd*, “I heard ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib say, ‘Company of people! Fear Allah and beware of excess about ‘Uthmān and calling him “The burner of Qur’āns”. By Allah, he only burned them on the basis of the advice of a council of us, the Companions of Muḥammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.’” It is also reported that ‘Alī said, “If I had been ruler at the time of ‘Uthmān, I would have done to the copies of the Qur’ān the same thing that ‘Uthmān did.”

Section

Our scholars say that what ‘Uthmān did refutes the Ḥulūlīs and Hashwites who say that the letters and sounds are eternal and that recitation and reading are eternal and that faith is eternal and the *rūḥ* is eternal. The Community and all groups of the Christians, Jews and Brahmans believe – and indeed, every theist and unitarian – that that which is eternal is unaffected by any event, and no one’s power can affect it by any aspect or means. Non-existence is not possible for the eternal and the eternal does not become temporal and the temporal does not become eternal. As for the eternal,

there is no beginning to its existence whereas the temporal is that which exists after it was not.

Section

The Rāfiḍites attack the Qur’ān and say, “One person is sufficient to confirm the transmission of an *āyat* and mode just as you have done. You confirmed the statement of a single man, Khuzayma ibn Thābit, in reporting about the end of *Sūrat at-Tawba* and the *āyat* in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* ‘Among the believers are men...’ (33:23).” The reply to them is that when Khuzayma mentioned these words, many of the Companions remembered them and Zayd himself recognised them. That is why he said, “The last two *āyats* of *Sūrat at-Tawba* were missing.” If he had not already known them, he would not have known that anything was missing. So the *āyat* was in fact established by consensus, not by Khuzayma alone. The second answer is that it was established by the testimony of Khuzayma alone and the evidence of its soundness is found in the description of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and so has no need for another witness, which is not the case of the *āyat* in *al-Aḥzāb*. That is established by the testimony of Zayd and Abu Khuzayma who heard it from the Prophet. It is mentioned that Abu Khuzayma is not the same Khuzayma with whom the *āyat* of *at-Tawba* was found and he was known among the Anṣār. Anas knew him. The one with whom the *āyat* of *al-Aḥzāb* was found was Khuzayma ibn Thābit. There is no confusion in the story.

In Muslim and al-Bukhārī, Anas ibn Mālīk said, “The Qur’ān was gathered together in the time of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, by four, all of whom were from the Anṣār: Ubayy, Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal, Zayd ibn Thābit, and Abū Zayd.” Anas was asked, “Who is Abū Zayd?” and he replied, “One of my paternal uncles.” Also in al-Bukhārī, Anas said, “When the Prophet died, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, only four knew all the Qur’ān: Abū’d-Dardā’, Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal, Zayd and Abū Zayd.”

Ibn at-Ṭayyib said, “These traditions do not indicate that the Qur’ān was not memorised in the time of the Prophet and that only four of the Anṣār knew it by heart as Anas stated. It is confirmed by multiple paths of transmission that the entire Qur’ān was also known by ‘Uthmān, ‘Alī, Tamīm ad-Dārī, ‘Ubāda ibn aṣ-Ṣāmit, and ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ.” Anas’ words mean that only these four took it directly from the mouth of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. Most of them learned it from one another.

The Qāḍī did not mention ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd and Sālim, the client of Abū Ḥudhayfa, although they were among those who knew the entire Qur’ān. It is reported that ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said, “I was with the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and with him were Abū Bakr and whomever Allah wished. We passed ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd who was praying. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, asked, ‘Who is reciting the Qur’ān?’ He was told, ‘‘Abdullāh ibn Umm ‘Abd.’ He said, ‘‘Abdullāh recites the Qur’ān fresh as it was revealed.’”

One scholar said that this meant that he recited the first *ḥarf* in which the Qur’ān was revealed rather than the other seven which the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, was allowed after the Messenger of Allah, Jibrīl, recited the Qur’ān to him in Ramaḍān. It is related that Abū Zubyān said, “‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās asked me, ‘Which of the recitations do you recite?’ I replied, ‘The first recitation, that of Ibn Umm ‘Abd.’ He told me, ‘Rather it was the last. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, used to present the Qur’ān to Jibrīl once a year. In the year that he died, the Messenger of Allah read it to him twice. ‘Abdullāh was present and knew what was abrogated and changed in that.’” In Muslim, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr stated that he heard the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, say, “Take the Qur’ān from four: Ibn Umm ‘Abd – and he began with him – Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal, Ubayy ibn Ka‘b and Sālim, the client of Abū Ḥudhayfa.”

These reports indicate that ‘Abdullāh knew all the Qur’ān in the lifetime of the Messenger of Allah, contrary to what was said, and Allah knows best. In *Kitāb ar-Radd*, al-Anbārī transmitted that ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd said, “I learned 72 (or 73) *sūras* from the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and I read to him from *al-Baqara* as far as ‘*Allah loves those who repent*’ (2:222).” Abū Ishāq says that he learned the rest of the Qur’ān from Mujammi‘ ibn Jāriya al-Anṣārī. If this is true, the consensus which Yazīd ibn Hārūn mentioned is true and that is why Qādī Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib did not mention him among those who knew the Qur’ān by heart in the time of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. Allah knows best.

Part of what will indicate the soundness of Ibn Mas‘ūd’s knowledge of the Qur’ān is that the people with the readings among the people of the Ḥijāz, Syria and Iraq all traced their readings which they chose back to one of the Companions who read it to the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. ‘Āṣim traced his reading to ‘Alī and Ibn Mas‘ūd, Ibn Kathīr to Ubayy as did Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’, and ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Āmir traced his to ‘Uthmān. All of them said that they had read it to the Messenger of Allah. The *isnāds* of these readings are continuous and the transmitters are reliable, as al-Khaṭṭābī stated.